

## Inside China's War on Terrorism

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# Inside China's War on Terrorism

MARTIN I. WAYNE\*

*China's war on terrorism is among its most prominent and least understood of campaigns. An indigenous insurgency with links to the global jihad has threatened the government's grip on a massive region of northwestern China known as Xinjiang. Riots, bombings, ambushes, and assassinations have rocked the region under separatist and Islamist banners. China acted early and forcefully, and, although initially brutal, their efforts represent one of the few successes in the global struggle against Islamist terrorism. China's campaign, which has reshaped local society and government institutions, has been so effective that scholars and statesmen now debate whether China genuinely confronts a terrorist threat from Xinjiang.*

Among the most prominent and least understood of campaigns in which the Chinese state is engaged is its war against terrorism. With links to the global jihad, an indigenous insurgency threatened the government's grip on a massive swath of northwestern China known as Xinjiang, the 'new frontier' and the war's primary theater. Riots, bombings, ambushes, and assassinations rocked the region under separatist and Islamist banners. One thousand of China's Uyghurs, the land's once predominant ethnic 'minority', trained in Afghanistan's camps specifically to return home and wage a new jihad, a new fight against the Chinese government. China acted early and forcefully, preventing the nascent insurgency from gaining momentum and escalating into what could have become China's Chechnya, Gaza, or Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Because this campaign has been so effective, much of the debate today focuses on whether China genuinely confronts a terrorist threat.

China responded brutally, yet the counterinsurgency's effectiveness increased as the brutality was reduced. Though greatly diminished in frequency, torture and summary executions reportedly persist;<sup>2</sup> explicitly, these are symptoms of an un-free political system and are not the tactics which achieved success. While the Chinese

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1. E.g. Chinese Communist Party, author unknown, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Yu Xinjiang Minzu Wenti [The Chinese Communist Party's Xinjiang Ethnic-Minority Problem]* (CCP, 2005); Dru Gladney, 'Xinjiang: China's West Bank?', *Current History* 106(656), (2002).

2. Joseph Kahn, 'Torture is "widespread" in China, UN investigator says', *The New York Times*, (3 December 2005); Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report 2006*, (18 January 2006), available at: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org); Human Rights Watch, *Essential Background Overview of Human Rights Issues in China*, (31 December 2005), available at: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org).

campaign was brutal, the campaign's effectiveness was due to social policies which reached deeply into society's grass-roots and reshaped it from the bottom up. Society in Xinjiang today increasingly rejects insurgency as the path forward, quietly looking to a future tied to a changing Chinese state.

While there has been ongoing low level violence in Xinjiang since 9/11, Chinese government claims that this is the result of Uyghur separatists are suspect. In interviews Uyghurs, especially many young men with no love for the Chinese, reported being appalled by these attacks which several explicitly termed 'a crime against humanity'. Some still harbor the dream of violent resistance against Chinese rule, yet anti-government violence is a reality in nearly every polity. Fundamentally, since the insurgency's high water mark of 1997, Uyghur society as a whole has largely turned away from the path of violent resistance.

Internal unrest and the drive for stability is the primary concern of China's leadership, and the state's project in Xinjiang is a pillar of this effort. Chinese reportage on terrorism is notoriously problematic, at times imprecise or simply fabricated. Lacking press freedom and having strong disincentives for officials to report incidents which might reflect poorly on their job performance, anemic information-flow is a disease present to various degrees across the entire country though dramatic on issues of internal stability. With this in mind, let us now return to Xinjiang's insurgency.

### **Insurgency in Xinjiang**

Xinjiang's insurgency is fundamentally indigenous, though like many similar fights it has reportedly received external support. Primarily, this support included the pre-9/11 training of some 1,000 Uyghurs in Afghan and other camps and perhaps included modest financing and material support. However, anti-government violence in Xinjiang has been a home-grown affair, dropping precipitously since around the Yining uprising of 1997 in which over 1,000 Uyghurs rioted and over 150 were reportedly killed by security force excesses.<sup>3</sup> Since 9/11 reports of violence persist, yet are greatly diminished in scope and scale.

Understandably, in the wake of 9/11 much of the international discussion of terrorism focused on the most circumscribed and proximate of problems: the organization and its composite individuals which orchestrated the attacks. Unfortunately, this myopic analytic focus on al Qaeda distorted our understanding of the broader threat of the global jihad and its many local insurgencies. Al Qaeda is an important component of the phenomenon, yet to understand the phenomenon internationally and locally we must also look beyond the simple questions of institutional or material connections.

Al Qaeda is at the forefront of a global insurgency, one linking many local fights against regimes perceived to be occupying or defiling Muslim lands. At first a rolodex of fighters and a network of terror cells, al Qaeda worked to inspire a broader uprising through terrorist attacks internationally and supporting indigenous local insurgencies.

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3. For a powerful description of this event see Amnesty International, 'People's Republic of China Rebiya Kadeer's personal account of Gulja after the massacre on 5 February [1997]', (2007).

Today al Qaeda is less of an organization than a movement and a cause, unified by the dream of avenging Islam's dignity through bloodshed.<sup>4</sup>

Al Qaeda attempted to set the world alight and topple unbelieving governments in order to establish its version of Islamic law across a large swath of Eurasia. In addition to being the last remaining superpower, casting a long shadow from actions in pursuit of various interests and values, the United States was attacked because al Qaeda perceived the USA to be a pillar of support for those governments al Qaeda wishes to topple. Building upon the self-perceived victory of the Afghan Mujahidin against the Soviet Union, al Qaeda established two operational tracks: terrorists and insurgents.<sup>5</sup> Terrorists—fighters hoping to strike strategic blows through single attacks—integrated themselves into target countries, planning, supporting, or executing missions. Insurgents—fighters preparing for protracted guerilla campaigns—were trained by al Qaeda at camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan or within local arenas.

Where al Qaeda conducted terrorism itself, its support for local insurgencies proved to be a less dramatic though arguably more powerful political tool towards the group's strategic goals. Funneling expertise, training, and support to local insurgencies brought the fight directly against governments 'occupying' Muslim lands.

Xinjiang's insurgency is indigenous, yet it too has received external material and ideational support from the global jihadist movement, specifically from al Qaeda and the al Qaeda-linked Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was the most prominent al Qaeda ally in Xinjiang, though this group has been relatively silent since its leader and an unknown number of followers were killed in Pakistan in 2003. China asserts that the People's Armed Police (PAP) in January 2007 raided a mining facility being used by terrorists with international ties near the country's borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan; reportedly, 17 were killed. Over a year later, despite the release of photographs depicting grieving family and comrades surrounding a PAP officer reportedly killed in the action, a full accounting of the raid has yet to surface.<sup>6</sup>

According to the US Congressional Research Service, 22 Chinese Uyghurs were once imprisoned in Guantanamo.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps five of these were Uyghurs who had visited camps but were far from hardened fighters, effectively abducted from Afghanistan and Pakistan by bounty-hunters who received some US\$5,000 a head.

4. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Bruce Hoffman, 'Insurgency and counterinsurgency in Iraq', RAND National Security Research Division Occasional Paper OP-127-IPC/CMEPP, (June 2004); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Rohan Gunaratna, 'The post-Madrid face of al Qaeda', *The Washington Quarterly* 27(3), (Summer 2004); Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist People's War in Post-Vietnam Asia* (Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Press, 2006); Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); J. Boyer Bell, *The Dynamics of the Armed Struggle* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

5. For example, Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*.

6. For example, Martin I. Wayne, 'Al Qaeda's China problem', *PacNet* 8A, CSIS, (23 February 2007); Martin I. Wayne, 'Five lessons from China's war on terrorism', *Joint Force Quarterly*, (October 2007).

7. Shirley A. Kan, *US–China Counterterrorism Cooperation: Issues for US Policy* (Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 27 June 2006).

Five	Ten	Seven
Wrong Place, Wrong Time, Wrong Bounty Hunter	Training to Fight the Chinese in Xinjiang	Members of al Qaeda

Source: Congressional Research Service 6/27/2006

**Figure 1.** Twenty-two Chinese Uyghurs at Guantanamo.

Ten are believed to have been training to return to Xinjiang. Seven are accused of being hard-core al Qaeda fighters, like mercenaries or adventurers searching for the appropriate venue to next ply their trade (see Figure 1).

Each insurgency is tactically unique. In Xinjiang, violence persisted at a low level, with occasional rioting and attacks against government and military installations. Bombing of buses and public spaces occurred, though assassination of local officials is currently the most prevalent symptom of the residual insurgency in Xinjiang.<sup>8</sup>

China asserts that over 200 attacks occurred in Xinjiang in recent years; reportedly, over 160 people were killed and 440 were wounded.<sup>9</sup> At least eight groups are described by Chinese, American, or scholarly sources as operating against the PRC in Xinjiang. Because the group-activity data available in open sources are mixed and contradictory at best, the trends of the insurgency must be taken as an organic whole. The search for granularity within the insurgency is important in gauging the threat, yet insurgencies are dynamic and evolving conflicts. Society's perception of power and security in the contest between insurgency and state is the key variable, and these perceptions are what knit scarce or illusory facts into a more-whole cloth.

In 1990 an uprising in Baren, near China's border with Afghanistan and Pakistan, marked a qualitative difference in Xinjiang's politics of dissent, ushering in the only period in recent history in which the state's position was genuinely at risk. Anti-state and independence activities also contained religious elements. A wave of terrorism rose internationally in the Afghan war's wake; though unrest has been present in Xinjiang since before the formation of the PRC, Xinjiang's indigenous insurgency in the 1990s infected society and began severing the state from the people. While forces from Afghanistan crossed the border into Xinjiang once the Soviet threat was

8. United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003* (2004); James Millward, *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment* (Washington: East-West Center, 2004); Yitzhak Shichor, 'The great wall of steel: military and strategy', in S. Fredric Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p. 412; Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang—China's Muslim Far Northwest* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

9. Information Office of State Council, *East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity* (21 January 2002); 'FM spokesman: ETIM a wholly terrorist organization', *People's Daily*, (13 September 2002).

neutralized, these forces were repulsed with relative ease using military and diplomatic tools. More problematic for China, some young local men, along with their closest friends, pursued a path of violence in search of what they perceived as defending themselves from an invading, predatory Chinese state.

While people in Xinjiang felt the state's grip to be weakening in the short term as the image of the fighter-victorious held sway, they still believed that what they saw as a Chinese colonial project would soon wipe out their culture if they did not act. The Chinese state was perceived as a threat to society, but the state's instruments of power, an aging conventional military less capable than the Soviet armies just defeated in neighboring Afghanistan, no longer seemed invincible. The age of the fighter had arrived; forms of resistance to the state—by gun or bomb, boycott or protest—were now perceived to be more than viable options, they were required by the situation.

### **China's 'infinite' political will**

Insurgency, like all warfare, is a contest to impact enemy and constituent political will. Confronting an insurgency would be impossible without the will to act, no matter how capable the forces, rich the country, or necessary the fight. Political will is a set of deep beliefs and preferences held by society, and it is the causal enabling factor for effective counterinsurgency.

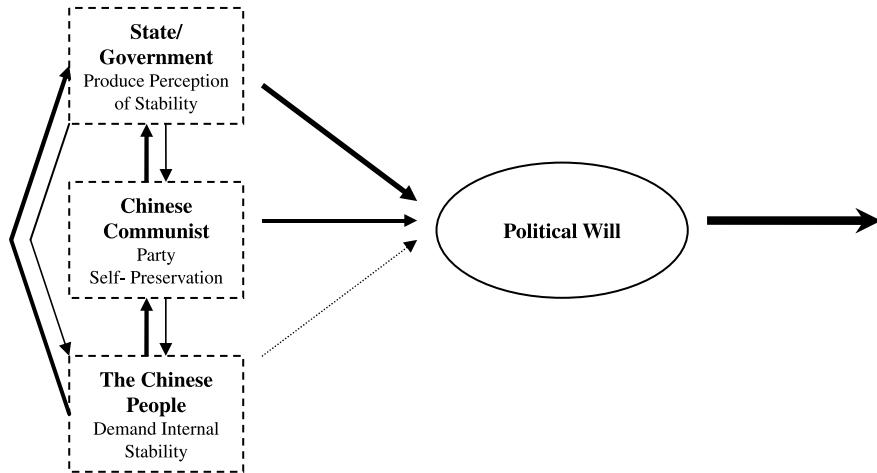
Where public opinions are ephemeral and subject to the machinations of events and leaders, political will is a shared emotion within society that endures; it is a subterranean reservoir which supports or sustains a polity across tumultuous events. This reservoir is the center of gravity with which insurgents and the state must contend.

Just as insurgents must convince local society that the insurgency represents the best or only path forward, states can not long survive costly adventures and projects in the periphery if the core rejects them. Simply, the greater the political will the greater the likelihood of successful counterinsurgency.

China has an enormous and replenishing reservoir of political will with which to confront the insurgency in Xinjiang because of socio-structural and historic factors. Three areas of the core's society build this key enabling resource: the primary position of the Communist Party; the state's pursuit of security; and the people's demand for stability (see Figure 2).

Countering the insurgency in Xinjiang is a priority for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because of the Party's position in society's structure achieved through a hard-fought historic struggle. The CCP jealously sits atop a one-party state, ever guarding its position of primacy within society. At each level of governance, from the grass-roots up through the top leadership, the CCP has a parallel and slightly more equal officer working in tandem with the counterpart state official.

The luster of Communist ideals has faded from eastern China's large cities, yet the appeal of power and privilege endures. Economic Communism has nearly vanished in China; a rough and rugged crony-capitalism is filling this void. Political communism morphed into an authoritarian system: power for power's sake, unsupported by the previous thin veneer of ideology. Maintaining its grip on the state's power is the sole motivating force, and the sole ideology, left within the CCP.



**Figure 2.** Sources of China's political will vis-à-vis Xinjiang.

Countering Xinjiang's insurgency serves this purpose by validating the CCP claim of effective leadership.

The state must counter Xinjiang's insurgency because threats from the periphery are multiple and linked: if one area of China secedes the country could disintegrate. While the details are different in each case, China perceives that Tibet and Taiwan (and perhaps other areas) have repeatedly come close to splitting from the mainland. China's claim to each of these locations is perceived to be tenuous and a successful bid by one might trigger renewed pushes by other areas of China's self-claimed periphery. Security is the fundamental job of any state; beyond preventing 'renegade provinces' from splitting, the state must provide internal stability. The question of stability is particularly important in China today because the people demand it; Chinese perceptions of domestic stability and steady progress toward a more healthy political life legitimize the state.

Insurgency in Xinjiang threatens the state by demonstrating the state's inability to manage both unrest in the periphery and provide the stability that the core demands. If the state is perceived as weak challenges and challengers will rise. Because of these socio-structural and political-historic factors the state must strongly confront the insurgency in Xinjiang if it is to survive: failing this, not only would the periphery rupture but the core would rebel.

Silently, the Chinese people demand that the state and the Party counter Xinjiang's insurgency. While knowledge of Xinjiang is limited even among the most educated in China's east, the Chinese people demand that their state hold the territory which it claimed decades ago. To back pedal on this would be to relinquish claim to the entirety of China. After decades of socio-political tumult, most prominently the self-inflicted wounds of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Chinese people today are tired of unrest and crave security.

Chinese society demands a stability which can bring progress at a measured pace, a pace which seems glacial to outside observers; the Chinese people have repeatedly

seen the disastrous effects of revolutionary movements. The cry for incremental movement toward the dream of a better, unified and freer, future is the primary reason why the core's society demands effective counterinsurgency in Xinjiang—even if the people never know the details. Fear of an ethnic 'other' is a powerful contributing factor.

The desire of the CCP to maintain its preeminent position atop the state and society, the state's attempt to avoid disintegration, and the people's thirst for stability combine into a unified purpose: for the Chinese core, Xinjiang's insurgency cannot be tolerated. Thus, not only does China, as a cohesive polity, have a large reservoir of political will with which to confront the insurgency but this reservoir is constantly replenishing if not expanding. The greater the challenge posed by Xinjiang's insurgent forces, the greater the core's will to counter this threat. China's political will to confront Xinjiang's insurgency is seemingly infinite.

### **The changing use of force in society**

Empowered and driven by overwhelming political will, China's use of force to counter Xinjiang's insurgency has changed dramatically since 1990, shifting to an overwhelmingly *bottom-up* approach. At first China used brutal force to manage incidents of unrest while other tools could take effect within society. Over time, however, the military took on a supporting role with paramilitary and security forces in the lead on managing unrest. China pushed responsibility down the spectrum of violence and into the hands of forces increasingly capable of tailoring responses to local conditions and an incident's specific demands.<sup>10</sup>

Military force can be used to kill or capture insurgents; or, force can coerce society into rethinking the risks and rewards of insurgency. The first imperative focuses on isolating troublesome elites from the situation. The second imperative focuses on adding pressure to the situation and altering society, however temporarily. While China's campaign began as an effort against troublesome elites, the use of force quickly evolved into a *bottom-up* approach targeting society's support for the insurgency itself (see Figure 3).

Pressure on society in Xinjiang is achieved through the force of arms and the force of bodies. Militaries can kill, but their greatest role is that of quiet coercion. The numbers are disputed, yet China maintains what is perceived by Uyghurs as a considerable troop presence near or within Xinjiang's major cities and other strategic locations. These forces are augmented not only by paramilitary forces but also, through Uyghur eyes, by the massive influx of ethnic Han immigrant-residents, now nearing 50% of the population. Chinese sources accurately speak of a 'four-in-one'

10. For example, 'Role of Xinjiang production, Construction Corps important: White Paper', *Xinhua* (26 May 2003); People's Republic of China, Information Office of the State Council, 'China's national defense in 2006', (31 December 2006) available through *Xinhua*; People's Republic of China, Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2004*, (27 December 2004), available at: [www.fas.org](http://www.fas.org); People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in 2002*, (2003), available at: [news.xinhuanet.com](http://news.xinhuanet.com); Shichor, 'The great wall of steel'; David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Harold Brown *et al.*, *Chinese Military Power* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2003). See also, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (1989–2006). IISS consistently estimates the PAP strength at two to three times the force strength presented by the 2006 Chinese defense white paper.

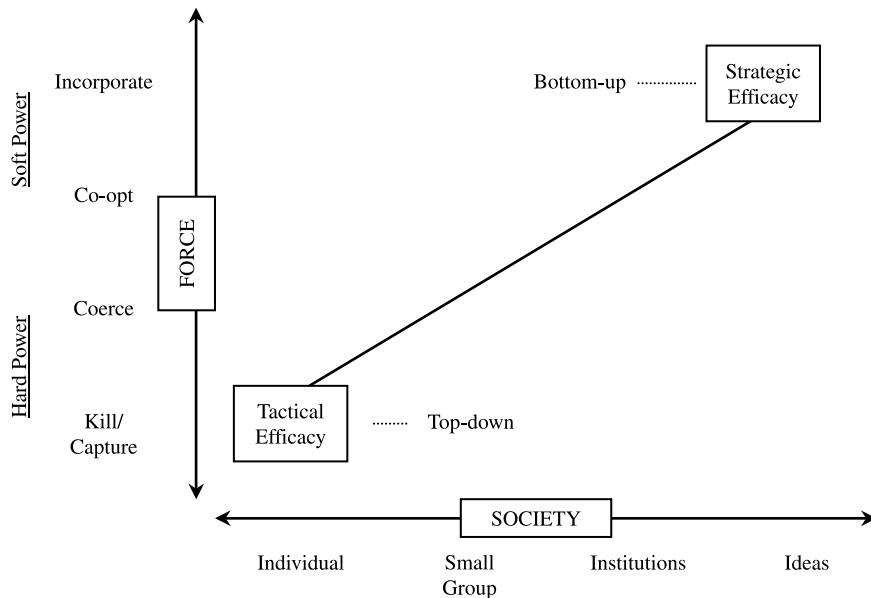


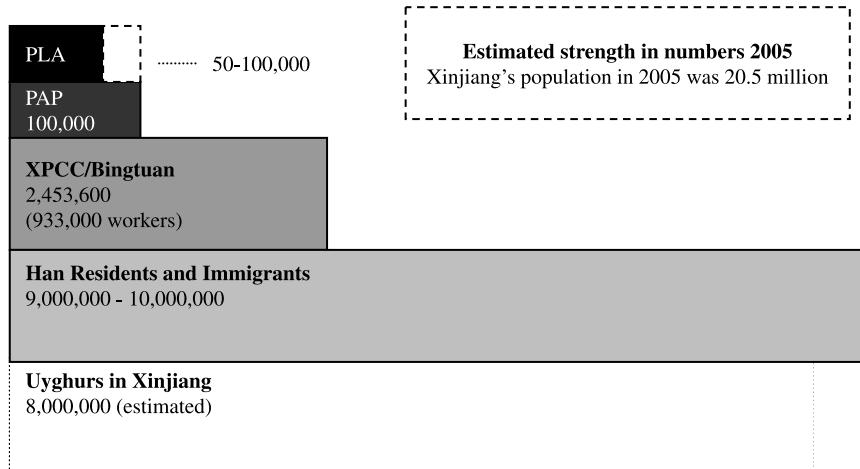
Figure 3. Counterinsurgency.

system of defense: the People's Liberation Army (PLA); the paramilitary People's Armed Police (PAP); the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC); and the people. Together these forces have acted swiftly against a nascent insurgency, repeatedly crushing revolts, and pressuring society to reject insurgency while other programs took effect (see Figure 4).

China's use of force in Xinjiang has evolved since the insurgency began. In 1990 the PLA directly fought against insurgents. Though far from perfect, by 1995 the PAP had grown more capable and could crush local incidents of unrest, even revolts provoked by arbitrary local civilian leaders. Police sweeps and increasing violence marked 1996; in 1997 a rebellion rocked the city of Yining (Guljia) which the PAP crushed with PLA backing. The 2001–2006 period is marked by PAP and PLA shows of force, but dramatically less overt state violence.

China's force-mix shifted from military to paramilitary and local security forces in order to counter Xinjiang's insurgency. While these forces have acted brutally and coercively throughout, the role of the military was scaled back and forces with local knowledge, local presence, and local membership were pushed to the fore. China at first lacked the tools necessary to counter the insurgency, yet more appropriate tools of state coercion were constructed and implemented. As the insurgency evolved so too did the counterinsurgency. The crude tools of military coercion were replaced with those more accepted as legitimate, or at least tolerable, by local society.

Beyond local reasons for the evolution in China's tools of coercion, international factors also must be considered. The United States leads an 'international community' increasingly concerned about human rights and increasingly willing to intervene on behalf of oppressed peoples. Still under the post-Tiananmen-massacre



**Figure 4.** China's 'four-in-one' defense.

sanctions regime, the PRC aligned itself with those on the receiving end of the new norms of humanitarian intervention—that is, with the governments accused of atrocity. China's leaders consciously did not want to have Xinjiang turn into the next Kosovo. Adapting force down the military spectrum and toward civilian tools not only worked to counter the insurgency but also helped remove a degree of international heat. Though international human rights groups consistently document violations of basic human rights in Xinjiang, the Chinese government to date has effectively achieved considerable freedom of action.

Three further developments beyond Xinjiang's borders contributed to China's evolution of force-structure: the PLA's distaste for the Tiananmen massacre and demand to never again be used against Chinese society; the disintegration of the Soviet Union and consequent strategic recalibration of China's military force for future conflicts; and the first Gulf War in which Chinese weapons in Iraqi hands proved disastrously outmatched by international militaries. These developments drove modernization and professionalization of China's armed forces, first pushed large numbers of PLA soldiers into the PAP, and the PAP also began its own reform efforts.

### Grass-roots institutions and security

As the insurgency began in earnest, China found itself weak, its organs lacking, and under increasing threat. Through quiet and accruing actions the insurgency nearly severed the Party-state from society. China's institutions in Xinjiang were incapable of effectively responding because they had already been infiltrated and were under siege. Military and paramilitary forces learned to crush unrest in the streets and respond to insurgent attacks; yet preventing the insurgency from taking greater hold within society, gaining political will and power, required new tools as well as adapting old tools for the evolving situation.

In response to the insurgency's gaining traction within society, China rebuilt its Party, government, and security forces at the grass-roots level. It reclaimed Xinjiang from the insurgency by establishing an apparatus capable of policing society (including the state's institutions) at the most local levels. Beyond re-taking the state's institutions China pressed outwards, turning social institutions (e.g. family, work-group, neighborhood, and also friendship) against the insurgency. The strategic use of society's grass-roots institutions to directly effect enemy action, will, and in the case of counterinsurgency to counter the insurgent dream, is here termed 'society-centric warfare'.

Local institutions—be they Party, government, security, educational, or religious—are the point of contact between the state and society; while terrorist attacks often are the primary if not sole focus of analytical energies, the infection and inoculation of local institutions is among the most important arenas for contesting insurgency. Local institutions carry the potential for being most capable of holding the line, using knowledge of local circumstances and needs, and turning society against the insurgency.

Rebuilding the state's institutions from the grass-roots increases the perception of state power by creating the image, if not the reality, of more effective local governance. Xinjiang's grass-roots institutions were purged of those suspected of sympathizing with or participating in the insurgency; a new generation of educated Uyghurs was brought into the governance apparatus along with Hans who had credentials beyond simple ideological loyalty. Professionalization and deference to local decisions re-tooled the relationship of Xinjiang's government both with society and with higher bureaucratic levels.

State power increases through enhancing institutional capacity and enriching the state's ability to reach deeply into society to detect and remove threatening elements. China's re-built institutions did not eliminate the insurgency alone but, in concert with the coercive instruments discussed above, kept the insurgency at a manageable level while other tools could take hold and reshape society.

China built up security services, including local police and networks of informants and spies, capable of operating within Xinjiang's society. Together these forces collect intelligence and operate against individuals, organizations and groups, as well as countering ideas and ideology. Targeting individuals and organizations, both domestically and abroad, is an attempt to isolate insurgent elites from society. Targeting ideas and ideology works to diminish people's support for insurgency by altering society's perceptions of power and security, and revaluing prospects for the future. Simply, China's agents fight against what they consider political, thus anti-state, uses of religion while putting forward a positive message of a better future through ethnic harmony.

Xinjiang's security services employed society-centric warfare, whereby the state turned society's institutions against the insurgency, and against the insurgents. Through coercion or enticement, social units were held responsible for their members: towns and villages for their population; work-groups for their workers; neighborhoods for their residents; families for their sons and fathers. Social units were induced to police themselves or suffer the consequences, ranging from subtle to heavy coercion. Importantly, draconian coercion is not what made China's

society-centric warfare a viable strategy. Instead it was by knowledge of Xinjiang's social structure that China was able to place effective pressure upon the nascent insurgency, thereby curtailing insurgent attempts to set society alight.

### The reshaping of society in Xinjiang

Beyond coercion, China countered Xinjiang's insurgency by creating hope for society tied to and intertwined with the state. In concert with the military, security, and institutional policies discussed above, China used educational, religious and cultural, economic, and governance policies to reshape society and remove support for the insurgency. Together, these policies reshaped perceptions of state and insurgent power. The state countered the insurgent dream by creating a competing dream, one more plausible and tangible, achievable only through participation in the state's project.

Transforming society into an environment hostile to insurgency, one that is fundamentally incompatible with the dream of fighting the state for a better future, is the strategic aim of a *bottom-up* approach. Each society is different and will vary in reaction to social-policy tools' content and implementation; this section presents the successes and difficulties encountered in the Chinese case.

Educating children and young adults is a powerful state tool for impacting the ideas and conditions of society. In Xinjiang, education opens a pathway toward opportunity for students, a way off of farms or out of villages, towns, or even the Region. While most students will never see these benefits, the prospect of a better life is compelling and salient; students are striving toward this goal. Though education in Uyghur language is available in parallel schools, the Han language (*Hanyu*, also known as Mandarin) schools are increasingly chosen by Uyghur families. *Hanyu* is the language of upward mobility in Xinjiang, as in all of China; it is the language of the college entrance examination and it is the language of business. While the number of successful Uyghurs is perceived to be few, enough exist that many localities can have their heroes who followed the state's path.

Educated Uyghurs are now employed as teachers in local elementary and high schools to teach Beijing's ideas in the Uyghur language.<sup>11</sup> Employing educated Uyghurs to teach in Uyghur-language schools delivers visible local employment; teachers receive enough pay to live comfortably but not lavishly, yet teachers hold a position of great respect within Uyghur society. Through jujitsu-like actions the state turned ethnic-nationalist sentiment against the insurgency, taking men and women who could have become anti-state elites and using them for the state's project of reshaping society.

The content of education also helps shape society's perceptions. History is among the most contentious and controlled topics in Xinjiang, for history enables people to place their life's events into a broader fabric of human experience and meaning. Insurgency in part is a discussion of where society has been and where it is going;

11. In an action reminiscent of the French head-scarf controversy or more dated debates in Turkey, since 2000 Uyghur language education has been curtailed at the university level, being currently allowed only for courses in which the language is deemed directly necessary (such as Xinjiang's history). Restrictions on beards and clothing also follow this pattern of forced acculturation as well.

to counter insurgency the state must construct and convince society of the state's narrative.

Like history, society's understanding of international affairs can powerfully impact an insurgency. Tactics, military and political, can be learned from other arenas. Yet most important for the Chinese case is local society's understanding of the fortunes of various insurgencies abroad. Each society has different structures, tolerances, and dreams; Uyghur society on the whole has thus far rejected turning Xinjiang into another Chechnya, Gaza, or another Iraq. Uyghurs are cognizant of what has happened in these arenas and do not see those fights as a viable path to adopt or adapt.

China takes considerable international heat for its religious and cultural policies in Xinjiang. The aim of these policies has been to remove what the state perceived as threatening political content from religion. Using religious forums to challenge state policies or social conditions is not tolerated, although the average Uyghur's pursuit of spiritual enlightenment is not blocked by state policy. Simply, the Party-state removed political dissent from religious discourse through society-centric warfare, the use of spies and informants, and training imams.

The state also constrains who can practice and study religion. In Xinjiang, people over 18 are allowed to worship relatively freely in open forums which the government can monitor, should it so choose. Uyghurs with leadership positions in the state or society are heavily pressured to not practice religion publicly or else face retribution, either through their jobs or through shadow actions of the security services.

Controlling, constraining, and steering Islam in Xinjiang is unpopular internationally yet it is an important feature of China's counterinsurgency. While attempting to avoid undue, or perhaps uncontrollable, antagonism of society the state worked to remove all sources and places of challenge to the Party-state status quo within society. Religious leaders, facilities, events, and ideas were used against the Chinese in Xinjiang by the insurgency. China thus countered support for independence or the creation of a caliphate by reining-in radical religious voices and providing assistance to moderate ones.

Economic development was not a crucial element in countering Xinjiang's insurgency. Despite the Chinese leadership's cult belief in economics as the solution to all of the country's problems, China's economic policies in Xinjiang actually engendered animosity. Economic development in Xinjiang demonstrated the state's power, yet made society's vulnerability more salient. Uyghurs can see material changes yet even upwardly mobile Uyghurs express resentment over what they see as pervasive and overt discrimination in the job-market, coupled with Chinese firms bringing Hans from the east to work on infrastructure projects and in extractive industries. Xinjiang holds 30% of China's domestic oil and natural gas, and nearly 40% of China's coal. Uyghurs perceive the Chinese state as extracting their land's resources using an alien workforce while realizing little benefit for Uyghur areas.

Governance politics too have a complex trajectory. As the state and Party each worked to increase the numbers and quality of Uyghur cadres and leadership, Uyghur society began rejecting the insurgency for other, non-institutional and non-instrumental political reasons. As local governance became more capable, socially knowledgeable, and representative, society in Xinjiang sought socio-political

stability. While the content of this new and growing dream flows through the state, it rejects the authoritarian present where local tyrants have their way, unchecked. Deep within Uyghur society today is a growing trend, a dream permeating society's bedrock of life beyond the Party-state, but one that can be realized without insurgency.

Though nebulous and ill-formed, Xinjiang's society seems to be readying for a change in the nature of the state itself. Society need not support an insurgency which might bring harsh radical Islamist dictates, violent chaos, or increased state repression; time and momentum are on society's side. Suffering through tyrannical government today can be endured: just look at the freedoms of eastern China; witness the colored revolutions of Central Asia.

### **Gauging effectiveness**

China has effectively countered Xinjiang's nascent insurgency by acting early and comprehensively, crafting an overwhelmingly *bottom-up* approach. China's actions included needlessly brutal measures which wasted state energy and alienated potential allies, yet the campaign has thus far succeeded when China focused on responsibly interacting with Xinjiang's society. The insurgency in Xinjiang, the dream of evicting the Han and joining a new caliphate, has not disappeared. The counterinsurgency too continues to evolve.

Some 17 years since the insurgency began in earnest, it is possible to draft an analysis of the counterinsurgency's approach and policy tools. Insurgency lives in society's underground, confronting the state when it perceives an opportunity or vulnerability. China's success lies primarily in the state's approach to insurgency as a battle for the soul and hopes of society. Rather than simply killing or capturing terrorists, China pursued a proactive and comprehensive *bottom-up* strategy to counter insurgency in Xinjiang.

Violation of human rights is not what made China's campaign effective thus far. Instead, intimate knowledge of local society allowed China to leverage grass-roots institutions against the insurgency as a whole. Rather than focusing on trying to kill or capture an ever-increasing pool of insurgents and terrorists, China focused on the political nature of the threat. As the United States confronts insurgencies internationally, we would do well to learn from China's war on terrorism.